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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4993

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHJA/ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9527

RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0182

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0861

RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0037

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 006802

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2014

TAGS: PREL KPAL ID IS

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER MAKES LOW-KEY VISIT  
TO INDONESIA

REF: A. JAKARTA 6491 (PA MINISTER VISIT)

¶B. JAKARTA 6510 (PA MINISTER VISIT DEMARCHE)

Classified By: Political Officer John Rath. Reason: 1.4 (D).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a May 26 visit to Indonesia, Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Mahmud Al-Zahar elicited statements of support for Palestinian statehood from GOI President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and other senior GOI officials. After meeting with his Palestinian counterpart, Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda told the media that the GOI would provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians but did not specify either the type of assistance or the channel through which it would be provided. Wirajuda also stated that the GOI was looking into the feasibility of establishing a representative office in Palestinian territory, and announced that PA President Mahmoud Abbas would visit Indonesia in June. Al-Zahar later met briefly with parliamentary leaders, and reportedly accepted a check from officials of the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) totaling approximately USD 260,000 that had been collected from private donations. In marked contrast to the recent bombastic barnstorming tour of Jakarta by Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad, Al-Zahar's visit was brief and low-key, with minimal public grandstanding and scant media coverage. End Summary.

Formal Meetings and Little Else

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¶2. (SBU) Announced as a three-day visit, Al-Zahar's Indonesian visit was subsequently trimmed to a single day to accommodate subsequent visits to Brunei and Malaysia. According to Wirajuda's post-visit press briefing and written GOI-PA joint declaration, Al-Zahar and Yudhoyono's meeting focused on Indonesia's support for Palestinian statehood and the GOI's "keenness" to play a role in supporting Palestinian aspirations. Wirajuda stated that Yudhoyono pledged humanitarian aid to Palestinians but specified neither the amount of such aid nor the channel through which it would be provided. After stating that the GOI was looking into the feasibility of establishing a representative office in Palestinian territory, Wirajuda expressed support for "the Palestinian National Dialogue initiated by PA President Mahmoud Abbas" and announced that Abbas would visit Indonesia in June. Wirajuda also stated that he had encouraged Al-Zahar to seek statehood by "continuing the existing peace process." In sharp contrast to the recent visit to Indonesia by Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad, media coverage of Al-Zahar's meetings was minimal and Yudhoyono did not conduct

a joint press conference with him.

¶3. (SBU) Also unlike the Ahmadinejad visit, when the Iranian President delivered several bombastic speeches before throngs of adoring students and Muslim leaders, Al-Zahar's public statements consisted only of brief impromptu remarks delivered after attending a Friday noon congregational prayer at Jakarta's main mosque. He later met with Parliamentary leaders Agung Laksono and Hidayat Nur Wahid. Hidayat and other PKS officials also met with Al-Zahar and reportedly presented him a check totaling approximately USD 260,000 that had been collected by PKS from private donors who wished to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and their elected government. The fund-raising effort was launched in April during a large PKS rally outside the Embassy.

Comment

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¶4. (C) The Palestinian cause has long had significant emotional appeal in overwhelmingly Muslim Indonesia, and a high-level GOI reception for Palestinian leaders - whether Hamas or Fatah - plays well here, particularly among politicized Muslims and students. Since taking office in late 2004, Yudhoyono has remarked frequently (most recently during a late-April trip to the Middle East to drum up Gulf Arab investment) that Indonesia would like to play a greater role in facilitating Middle East peace. Such vague statements of interest, however, have not yet been followed by concrete measures. The GOI understands that it has no place at the Quartet table, and Yudhoyono's "Middle East Envoy" Alwi Shihab was parked into the largely-ceremonial post without an office or staff late last year as a

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face-saving sop after his sacking as Coordinating Social Affairs Minister. Potential Indonesian mediation efforts must also navigate treacherous shoals of public opinion, as the subject of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel remains taboo and Wirajuda's periodic pull-asides with his Israeli counterpart at the UNGA and other international fora inevitably result in media reports and howls of complaint from a wide variety of political players, not all of whom represent Islamic-oriented parties. We expect that the GOI will lay on a bit more pomp and public exposure for PA President Abbas when he comes to town in June.

PASCOE